

© A Practical Guide ©
to Early Childhood Curriculum
Sixth Edition



Claudia Eliason © Loa Jenkins

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Edition

A Practical Guide to Early Childhood Curriculum

G61/W15

Claudia Eliason

Loa Jenkins



Merrill,
an imprint of Prentice Hall
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey

Columbus, Ohio

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Eliason, Claudia Fuhriman, (date)

A practical guide to early childhood curriculum / Claudia Eliason,
Loa Jenkins. — 6th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-13-685538-5

1. Early childhood education—Curricula. I. Jenkins, Loa
Thomson, (date) II. Title.

LB1139.4.E54 1999

372.19—dc21

98-17011

CIP

Cover photo: © The Stock Market

Editor: Ann Castel Davis

Production Editor: Sheryl Glicker Langner

Production Coordination: Linda Zuk, WordCrafters Editorial Services, Inc.

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Director of Marketing: Kevin Flanagan

Marketing Manager: Suzanne Stanton

Marketing Coordinator: Krista Groshong

This book was set in Bembo by BookMasters and was printed and bound by R. R.
Donnelley & Sons Company. The cover was printed by Phoenix Color Corp.



© 1999 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Simon & Schuster/A Viacom Company

Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

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Earlier editions, © 1994, 1990 by Macmillan Publishing, © 1986 by Merrill Publishing.

All photos courtesy of Paul L. Jenkins

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 0-13-685538-5

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*

Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*

Prentice-Hall of Canada Inc., *Toronto*

Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*

Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*

Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*

Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*

Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

Preface

Many are the times
we will teach
Many are the times
we will be taught.
. . . But only once, a child.

PHILOSOPHY AND PURPOSE

While preparing to teach, students become imbued with educational theories, but then often find themselves in the classroom as student teachers or professional teachers without practical knowledge of what and how to teach. They understand the theories of learning, but they often are unable to blend those theories with practical application appropriate for young children. Curriculum books for early childhood education abound, but they are frequently general, rather than specific, in content and direction.

In this textbook, we not only emphasize the application aspect of teaching, but also give a solid foundation for the theoretical basis of the concepts being applied. We want students and teachers to understand what can be taught to young children, why it is important, and how it can be accomplished. We also emphasize the importance of a child-centered curriculum that encompasses the whole child—physical, social, emotional, creative, and cognitive. This book focuses on cognitive areas of the curriculum and effective methods of curriculum implementation.

A Practical Guide to Early Childhood Curriculum evolved from the constant inquiry and search for meaningful teaching ideas by students and professional teachers. It also evolved from our teaching experiences in the primary grades, in Head Start, and in college and university classrooms and lab-

oratories. We are concerned that young children have high-quality school experiences. The concepts selected for inclusion are those that most often meet the needs, interests, and developmental levels of children ages three through eight years. However, they should not limit your thinking, planning, and imagination, but rather serve as a springboard for you and your students as you select projects and themes to explore.

This book is designed for those in the process of preparing to teach young children, as well as for those currently teaching—teachers, teacher's aides, parents, grandparents, church leaders, administrators, supervisors, and other care givers. Its purpose is to explore how children learn, what children can learn, and specific concepts, ideas, and strategies that are developmentally appropriate for young children.

CHAPTER PEDAGOGY

The unified pedagogy follows a specific format for most chapters: introductory comments, including content information; approach to teaching; chapter summary; student learning activities; and suggested resources. The introduction provides an overview of the chapter as well as specific background and guidelines on the concept/concepts, and the summary reviews the important notions presented. The approach to teaching provides very specific content information, precise concepts and ideas that are developmentally appropriate for young children, and many explicit ideas for classroom activities and experiences for young children. In addition, where appropriate, unit plans or webs are shared or illustrated within the approach to teaching section. Occasionally

within the chapters, also as a part of the approach to teaching section, a lesson plan is included to allow students the opportunity of seeing how one teacher might apply the concepts in the chapter. However, most lesson plan illustrations appear in Appendix A. The student learning activities offer discussion questions and many suggestions for applying the concepts presented in the chapter within the university or college classroom. Included in each chapter are current references and research on the specific areas. The full reference citations are listed alphabetically at the end of the book. The suggested resources at the end of the chapter provide updated lists of children's books, records, compact discs, audio tapes, pictures, multimedia kits, films, filmstrips, videos, and other audiovisual and technology aids. Literally hundreds of new works are published each month in early childhood education alone. Based on the kind of computer you have and your budget, we suggest you evaluate new software choices for your school, classroom, or center on an ongoing basis. We emphasize that the software selected should be developmentally appropriate, utilize a variety of approaches, emphasize a variety of concepts, and encourage problem solving.

CONTENT COVERAGE AND ORGANIZATION

Writing this sixth edition of *A Practical Guide to Early Childhood Curriculum* has been both exciting and challenging. Determining what information to add, expand upon, or delete has required much research, assessment, and introspection. In this current edition, there have been a number of major changes made, including a reorganization of the chapters. The text is divided into four parts, each presenting a solid theoretical discussion and rationale. Part 1 includes four chapters and provides an introduction and framework for the text. Chapter 1 is an overview of early childhood education and addresses its past, present, and future. The importance of early childhood education is also con-

sidered in depth. Chapter 2 concerns the developmental appropriateness of early academics, play, assessment, curriculum, and the physical setting. Theories of learning and children's excitement for learning are also included. Chapter 3 provides direction for developing partnerships between the school and parents; and a detailed discussion on curriculum planning is presented in Chapter 4.

Part 2 presents skills and concepts related to understanding and dealing with the self and others. Helping children learn about people and their diversities, focusing more on similarities than differences, is presented in Chapter 5. Although multicultural and anti-bias education is integrated throughout the text, it is also considered in greater depth in this chapter. Helping children learn more about their families and themselves is the focus of Chapter 6, which includes a discussion of character education and resiliency. New information regarding physical and nutritional fitness and general health issues is the focus of Chapter 7.

Part 3 includes five chapters that directly relate to cognitive development in the early childhood years. All curriculum development rests on the child's ability to understand language, and Chapter 8 reflects the authors' feelings regarding the importance of whole language development. In this revised chapter, theory is supported by many practical suggestions for integrating language and literacy across the curriculum. Young children should not only be taught to learn, memorize, and take in facts; more importantly, they must also learn to think deeply—to classify, explain, investigate, question, observe, sort, wonder, synthesize, communicate, analyze, compare, hypothesize, and predict. Science concepts and ideas for incorporation in the curriculum are discussed in Chapters 9, 10, and 11. Chapter 12 relates to math concepts and emphasizes problem-solving skills. Children should learn to solve problems initially by working with concrete ideas; then, equipped with problem-solving skills, they become able to generalize and handle more abstract problems.

Finally, Part 4 includes chapters on music and movement, creativity, art, and dramatic activities. These vital experiences should be frequently incorporated throughout the curriculum, and not just planned as occasional endeavors.

We emphasize that we take a developmental approach to teaching young children; that is, experiences are planned in accordance with the developmental needs of the children in the classroom or center. Although some lesson plans supporting the specific chapters are included throughout the text, Appendix A contains additional lesson plans that will expand the concepts and subjects presented in the book. Recipes have generally been moved from the body of the text and are now included in Appendix B.

Occasionally, we suggest the use of foods as art media; but we consider it imperative that children learn early the value of using and preserving, rather than wasting, food. Sometimes a food item, such as macaroni, may be more economical than purchasing beads for stringing necklaces. Also, discarded items such as oranges and potatoes from the produce department of the grocery store often expand the possibilities of creative art activities.

In the process of formulating the preface for this sixth edition, we read a statement that delightfully supports our own feelings regarding working with children: "Young children keep us from stalling in neutral gear. They make us drive in the heart of the center lane of life" (Chenfeld, 1995, p. 71). We find that working with young children is refreshing and helps keep us focused on the importance of the early childhood years. Our desire is that this text, which supports the child-centered and constructivist points of view, will assist you in planning and implementing a fully integrated, developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We express appreciation to the many people who have assisted, supported, and encouraged us in

this project. We are indebted to Paul Jenkins for the photographs throughout the book. We appreciate his sensitivity, skill, time, and effort. We also thank the many children and adults who cooperated in the photography, including the Iona Elementary School (Idaho Falls, Idaho), with Principal Bruce Roberts and teachers; the Fairview Elementary School (Idaho Falls, Idaho), with Principal Richard Black and teachers; and Carol Duncan and Louise Larson (Idaho Falls, Idaho), day-care providers. In addition, we thank the Lewis School in the Ogden City School District (Ogden, Utah), with Principal Catherine Montgomery and teachers.

A special thanks to Jana Jones for her assistance in providing information on teaching children with special needs. We also express our appreciation to the publisher's reviewers for their valued contributions to the completion of this book: Christine G. Bachelder, Black Hawk College; Beverly Brown Dupre, Southern University at New Orleans; Patricia Hofbauer, Northwest State Community College; and Colleen K. Randel, The University of Texas at Tyler.

Lisa Warner, of Eastern Kentucky University, shared materials with us, and Patrice Liljenquist Boerens contributed her graphics and artistic talents.

For editorial assistance, we thank Ann Davis and Pat Grogg at Prentice Hall; their wise direction, patient prodding, and demand for excellence were valued.

We are grateful for our interaction with the children, parents, and students we have taught. Their inspiration, incentive, behavior, and thoughts have influenced whatever understandings we have.

We recognize the contributions of the following early childhood education teachers who have graciously allowed us to publish their lesson plans: Donalee Jones Heaton, Valari Van Valkenburg, Roxann Rothwell, Janet Curtis, Mary Lyn Worley, Julee Ann Hawks, Barbara Scholes, Luci Fowers, Lynette Morris Whalen, Marianne Miller, Karen Clark, Joy Wadley Erikson, Joanne Conrad Anderson, Patsy Thurgood Matthews, Debra

Snow, and Adelle Taggart Karren. We are also indebted to Dr. Bonita Wise for her help with information on nutrition and food experiences.

We are indebted to our friends and families, especially to our husbands, Paul and Glen, whose patient support, interest, and encouragement

were vital to the completion of this new edition. We express thanks to our children, Jason, Cathrine, Anne, Matthew, Megan, Eric, Erin, Kyle, Kristen, and Catherine, whose examples have enlightened our understanding of the truths of childhood.

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Part One



Introduction to Early Childhood Education

The four chapters in Part 1 provide an introduction to and overview of this textbook. The focus of this book is on children ages 3 to 8 years or prekindergarten through third grade, and the curriculum emphasis is on play. During early childhood, it is suggested that more concepts and structure be added to the curriculum very gradually; however, we emphasize that even though there have been major sociological and technological changes in our society over the past years, developmental rates have not accelerated (Elkind, 1996). Children need environments and learning

experiences that are geared to their needs, not highly academic curricula planned around what adults think children ought to be learning and doing. Young children need child-centered environments that offer many opportunities for choices and encourage learning through play, exploration, and discovery. In addition, because children acquire competencies and abilities at different rates, it is suggested that a set or standardized curriculum be avoided during these years (Elkind, 1996).

Chapter 1 gives a historical perspective on early childhood education, discusses why it is

important, and includes current trends and considerations as well as a look at the future of early childhood education. The field of early childhood education is a dynamic, changing discipline that has strong roots but is presently blossoming in new and exciting ways.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) for early childhood. One of the important strands in the DAP perspective is play; it is respected both for its value and as an appropriate learning medium during early childhood. The importance of the physical environment is discussed as another strand in the DAP program. The value of various areas of the room or various play activities is considered, and criteria for selecting materials and toys are given. Teacher-made learning materials are also discussed. Other significant strands in developmentally appropriate practice are its approach to teaching and learning and the way learning is assessed. Because early childhood is a unique and distinctive stage in human development, programs need to adopt teaching practices that adjust to the way young children learn and to appropriate ways of assessing their learning and growth.

Still another significant strand is collaborating with parents. Chapter 3, *Developing Partnerships with Parents*, considers the relevance of the parent-school alliance and presents innovative ways for achieving optimum involvement of parents in our schools. It explores far beyond the singular traditional idea of parents volunteering in the classroom. Effective school-home partnership programs help parents realize that their participation has a positive influence on their children's success now and in the future (Brand, 1996; Washington, Johnson, & McCracken, 1995).

Political leaders, sensing the impact of parent involvement in schools, focused on the issue

in "Goals 2000." In 1989, the governors and the president of the United States developed six goals addressing the education of children—"Goals 2000: Educate America." Then in 1994, the United States Congress added two more goals, one of which directly relates to the importance of parental involvement in children's education. Goal number 8 states that "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (U.S. Department of Education, 1995a, 43). The goal continues, "Parents can emphasize good work habits, value learning and good character, set high expectations for their children, stay informed about their children's progress, and monitor their children's activities" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, 5). In order for children to integrate both the home and school experiences, it is imperative that children, their families, and their schools work as partners with one another.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of curriculum planning and gives examples using themes and units and also the "Project Approach" (Chard, 1992; 1994). It is hoped that those who use this book will learn the concepts, methods, and strategies that best meet the needs of young children and how to plan in such a way that children have age-appropriate, child-centered educational experiences. We emphasize that various levels of ability and development in each early childhood classroom should be expected, valued, accepted, and planned for; in fact, appropriate plans can be made only with the needs of children in mind. We address their diverse needs best when our perspective is one that regards early education as "a liberating, rather than a remedial, enterprise" (Elkind, 1996, 13).



1 Early Childhood Education

The beliefs of many philosophers, psychologists, and educators dating back to the 17th century have greatly influenced early childhood education as it is practiced in the 1990s. The needs and values of early childhood education are many-faceted, and caring, qualified early childhood teachers are paramount to the learning of the developing child. In order to implement developmentally appropriate teaching practices in the child's early years, it is necessary for teachers and care givers to be aware of the developmental characteristics of the children with whom they are working. It is also imperative that teachers and care givers gain an understanding of the needs of children as they progress toward becoming well-adjusted, confident, and thoughtful learners.

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education has historical roots dating back for centuries, although it has experienced a renewal in the past few decades. Various philosophers and unique philosophies have impacted early childhood education, but one's own, individual perspective is what has the greatest influence on actions, teaching, and the curriculum.

Highlights of the 17th and 18th Centuries

Prior to the 1900s, childhood was not looked upon as an important, valuable, and viable part of the total life span. Around 1690, the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) was one of

the first to emphasize the importance of individual differences, the early years and experiences, and play. Rousseau (1712–1778), a French philosopher, suggested that society has a corrupting influence on children and that children should be treated with sympathy and compassion. In his classic work *Emile* (1762), Rousseau addressed the value of early childhood education, proposing that education begins at birth. The Swiss educator Pestalozzi (1746–1827) maintained that all persons have the right to an education—to develop skills, to learn those things that will help them be successful. He believed that children learn best through self-discovery.

Development of Kindergarten and Nursery School

Friedrick Froebel (1782–1852) originated the first kindergarten, around 1837 in Germany. To achieve his proposed objectives, he designed a curriculum based on play and materials. Froebel believed that children have innate gifts that need to be developed, and that they would cultivate these gifts by choosing activities that interest them (Osborn & Osborn, 1991). Elisabeth Peabody established the first English-speaking kindergarten in 1860 in Boston. Beginning in 1870 in the United States, and by World War I, kindergarten was incorporated into public schools in large cities. Today, kindergarten education is nearly as universal as elementary education.

In 1911, Margaret McMillan established the first nursery school in London. In the United States, Patty Smith Hill (1868–1946) was one of



Good early childhood teachers use many visuals.

the early pioneers in kindergarten education. After observing the McMillan nursery school, she also became a pioneer in nursery or preschool education. The early nursery schools were geared primarily for children who were poor, with a focus on nurturing them and serving to prevent both mental and physical illness. As the movement spread, they became more concerned with educating children.

Other Historical Contributors to Early Childhood Education

John Dewey (1859–1952), an American educator and philosopher, developed the idea of pragmatism and maintained that children should experiment and discover. He did not like rote teaching, but believed in natural materials and presumed that children should explore in a free-play environment, with much activity and freedom, geared to their own interests.

In the United States following World War I, the ideas of Sigmund Freud affected education. His theory emphasized unconscious motivation, conflicts between social expectations and spontaneous behaviors, and the impact of emotions on behaviors.

Maria Montessori (1870–1952), the first woman in Italy to be granted a medical degree, is best known for the teaching method that bears her name—the Montessori method. She opened the Casa dei Bambini (children's home) in a tenement area of Rome in 1907. There has been a resurgence of interest in the Montessori method since the reintroduction of her work by Rambusch (1962). Among Montessori's key ideas was her belief that the senses are the source of all intellectual growth and that intellectual development is, therefore, dependent upon the training of the senses. She developed a set of physical materials, autotelic in nature, to be used by the teacher in a prescribed manner. Self-discipline and autonomy were also key ingredients in her philosophy. She emphasized the importance of the school and family working together.

Arnold Gesell (1880–1961) played a key role in the early childhood movement and is particularly known for his research in establishing norms or indices of the types of behavior likely to occur in children at specific ages. However, he still emphasized the concept of individual differences and cautioned against using the norms literally.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) is noted for his interest in and theory of children's cognitive develop-

ment. The impact of his works on present-day education, psychology, and child development is increasingly evident. Piaget's work and writing have generated more interest and research in education and developmental psychology in the last 50 years than those of any other person. His research also radically changed our thinking about the growth of human intelligence. He had great love, empathy, and appreciation for children. Programs that adapt a Piagetian model emphasize that children learn through experimentation and initiative, and construct their own knowledge and understanding.

The focus in the 1920s and 1930s was on physical and intellectual development. During the 1930s, early education programs were based on the works of Froebel, Montessori, McMillan, Robert Owen, and a few other pioneers of early childhood education. Between 1940 and 1950, the emphasis was on physical, social, and emotional growth. At the 1950 White House Conference on Youth, Erik Erikson presented his theory on personality development, which was to gain widespread acceptance and favor among educators and swing the emphasis in early childhood education to the social and emotional side.

In the 1960s, research gave evidence that the early environment has a profound effect on the child's development. As a result, those from lower economic environments had greater opportunity for involvement and decision making in the education of their children. Project Head Start, a composite of federally funded preschool programs for children from impoverished backgrounds, was established in 1965. With the organization of Head Start, preschool education moved to the national level and programs became available for all children. The inception of Head Start presented a major change in early childhood education in the United States. It was hoped that by offering an enriched program for children from lower incomes, this "head start" would reverse the cycle of poverty. This program also emphasized the family and community. Perhaps its foremost accomplishment, however, was awakening in the public a sense of the profound importance of the early years and of education for the young.

The pressures of the 1960s were for openness, humanistic approaches to education, acceptance of individual learning styles, and education for the impoverished. Directions in the 1970s emphasized literacy, discipline, achievement in the "basics," conformity, and demands for accountability. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, many program models received attention. For example, home-based education focusing on teaching and working with parents was developed by Ira Gordon.

Another significant event in the 1970s was the enactment of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990). This law required that all children be given the opportunity to reach their fullest potential and that children with special needs be included in regular public school programs when possible. During the 1970s, much more emphasis was placed on understanding children with special needs or disabilities.

During the 1980s the importance of early education continued. The Ypsilanti, Michigan, Early Training Project is a research study based on Piaget's theorizing, with the aim of promoting total cognitive development. The program developers believe that preventive preschool programs must begin earlier than traditional preschool programs, because the critical years for early learning are age 3 and under. They also maintain that early intervention programs will be much more effective if they involve both the mother and the child. The Ypsilanti research project has presented solid evidence that preschool education does make a difference for children (Clement, et al., 1984; Schweinhart, et al., 1985; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980; 1992; Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986). Program models differ in their curriculum emphasis, structure, reinforcement methods, teacher role, activities, and materials, but no program has been found to be the best for all children, and the children in any program show improvements in the areas emphasized in that particular program. Many early childhood programs in the United States have taken an eclectic philosophical approach and drawn from many